



Meet The Team: Makayah Royal

Makayah Royal came into the NPS National Capital Region transportation program only three years ago, but she hit the ground running. The position had been vacant for two years. “I was handed a program sheet, and told ‘Here’s some projects...make them work.’”

And that became her goal. “I wanted to build a data-driven decision making process to assist Parks in the submission of projects, develop criteria for project selection, develop a stable program of projects with Federal Highway Administration and also keep NCR management informed on the status of selected projects,” Makayah said. “I had to split up



Makayah Royal

each of those tasks, and it took me awhile to get to a point where I was being productive. I'm proud of the record and that the program is up and running."

Makayah added that she hasn't had a lot of huge accomplishments. "But in public service, each day you just want to move the needle a little bit further. I think I'm doing that, and being successful incrementally."

Makayah was born in Warner Robins, Georgia. Her father was in the Air Force, and as is the case with many military families, Makayah grew up in a number of locations including Guam, Sicily and Bedford, Massachusetts.

Makayah attended Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. "Before I finished at Emory, I had a National Park Service job lined up at Ocmulgee National Monument," said Makayah. "It was a database job, but we lost the funding for the job, so that didn't work out. But I did try to go to the National Park Service early on!

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After graduating from Emory with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology, Makayah took a position at the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), in the Office of Environment as an ecologist/transportation planner. Along with her regular duties of wetland delineations, management of wetland and stream mitigation banking projects, and data collection for ecological resource reports at GDOT, she assisted in developing survey protocols for several state listed species.

While this was meaningful work, Makayah wanted to expand her transportation and environmental experience. The Georgia Tech City and Regional Planning Program piqued her interest, and in the fall of 2003 she left GDOT. At Georgia Tech, she participated in research for a Megaregions study, with analysis focusing on the Piedmont Atlantic Region. The study analyzed and forecast environmental, transportation, demographic, and economic trends of metropolitan centers and their surrounding areas.

While a graduate student, Makayah was awarded a position in the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Student Career Experience Program. This internship allowed her to work on a variety of FHWA, GDOT and MPO programs, projects and initiatives. At FHWA Georgia Division, she participated in reviews of environmental documents and section 7 coordination, public involvement and MPO meetings, and bridge scour research projects.

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Upon graduating from Georgia Tech, Makayah accepted a position in FHWA’s Professional Development Program (PDP). Initially her PDP assignments focused on environmental compliance, but during the fall of 2006, Makayah joined the Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) Program and Planning team. She was tasked with devising a strategy to initiate WFLHD’s effort to improve coordination among FLMAs and transportation planning agencies.

At the end of the PDP Makayah obtained a position at Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division (EFLHD) that allowed her to merge the environment and planning disciplines. Makayah led long range transportation planning efforts for NPS and Forest Highway programs, NPS congestion



Makayah with Seth Greenwell

management system development, and Climate Change and Livability.

One of the projects Makayah worked with was an updating of the EFL road inventory for Forest Highways. “We were creating a projection of their current roadway conditions, and providing an updated estimation of what their road conditions were,” she said. “I was also writing long range transportation plans for Forest Highways for several states, including Georgia, Virginia, and Minnesota.”

Makayah said her current position at the National Capital Region (NCR) comprises three roles. The first is program administration. “I make sure all the budgets are monitored regularly and balanced, and I do approvals,” she said. A second group of tasks is centered on technical assistance for park staff throughout project development. “I work with parks, other NCR staff, Denver Service Center (DSC) staff, and FHWA staff through the scoping, compliance, design, and project solicitation and award phases of each project.”

Makayah said her third role at NCR is to serve as a liaison for the FHWA to park staff, superintendents and the NCR management. “I help distribute information among those groups, and to decision makers and other stakeholders.”



When asked about her favorite project with the National Park Service, Makayah immediately identified a project that is very special to her: the Baltimore Washington Parkway Traffic Safety Plan. “I’m hoping we can move to the implementation phase of this project very soon,” she said.

“Our goal for that plan is to reduce fatalities and crashes on that parkway...that facility has the most fatalities in the NCR.” Makayah said that the team is assembling a task force with external stakeholders, park staff, US Park Police, WASO Risk Assessment, and NCR staff. (See on this web site the related project profile for the Baltimore Washington Parkway Traffic Safety Plan.)

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Makayah is quick to point out that she has received a lot of help in her work at both the FHWA positions and the NPS positions. “Charles Borders mentored me when I transitioned to the NPS FLTP team,” she said. “And Mark Anderson at WASO has been an advocate for me; he gave me the resources and institutional knowledge to help me get started. Dawn Foy has helped me with PTATS and coordination with NCR budget people. Then there’s John Tauscher and Kent Cochran, who have also given me advice and support.”

Makayah added that she tries to learn from everyone. “Even people I don’t agree with, I learn something from them,” she said. “I try to be a sponge in that way. And I try to show gratitude and appreciation for tenure; I think it’s important to give respect to people with experience.”

When asked about pranks or amusing stories from her work, Makayah quickly noted that “we don’t do a lot of pranks here...it’s a highly secure environment.” But she did mention an incident that got some laughs.

“I work with a civil engineer at the George Washington Memorial Parkway. I arrived late for one meeting, and as I walked into the room, the engineer said loudly, ‘I hope you brought your big purse today, Makayah, because we’re going to need lots of money.’ It caught me off guard, and everyone in the room started laughing. So now a lot of people

tease me: ‘Did you bring your big purse today?’ And I actually do have a sort of a large handbag.”

In her non-work hours, Makayah still spends a lot of her time using her organizational skills. “I’m very involved with my church, in one of the ministries I am a servant leader for Vacation Bible School. It’s a one-week introduction to Bible study for the community, and it takes about five months to plan the programming, recruit the teachers and staff, order the curriculum, set up the IT and equipment, and then execute the program.” Makayah said she also enjoys scrapbooking and connecting with friends.

The first time Makayah remembers being in a national park was the Ocmulgee Indian Mounds near Macon, Georgia. “I didn’t know it was a national park when I was a kid,” she said. “Later, when I was in grade school and we lived in Bedford, Massachusetts, we found that you could go through a little hole in a security fence, and get on a trail in the Minuteman National Park. I used to hang out there at a pond in the summer, catching crayfish and frogs and tadpoles. (The hole in the fence might today be considered “alternative transportation access.”)

Makayah’s favorite experience in a national park came as a shared experience with her father: being on the National Mall for the first inauguration of President Barrack Obama. “This was a beautiful, historic experience,” she said. “We were cheering, and singing, and it really made me feel American.”

Contact Makayah at the National Capital Region at 202/619-7092, or e-mail her at makayah_royal@nps.gov.



Makayah on the NPS National Mall in 1987